

ETHNOGRAPHY OF TZELTAL COMMUNITIES

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The boy is expected.

to live for a year with the girl's parents; then he makes his own home, usually near that of his father. If the boy's parents are sufficiently powerful, they may pay the girl's parents twelve pesos in lieu of the year's service. Villa was informed that a woman unable to pay a debt or a fine may be taken as a secondary wife by any married man who will pay the debt or fine; that a woman who loses her virginity may be bought similarly of her parents for a little rum; and that in the case of any of these polygynous marriages, a single household is maintained. No such household was observed.

No information was obtained on birth customs," or on customs in connection with death."

Blom and LaFarge describe a church festival held at Tecojá ranch on June 22 and 23." When Villa visited the highland villages the carnival was being celebrated. In Tenejapa on February 20 he witnessed the "Festival of the Flags" (*tahimalkin*). The (annually elected) leaders of the festival, the *alferoces*, assembled in the morning at the church. Each man conveyed a red banner with green edges, fastened to a pole, and each held in his mouth a short hook on which an orange was impaled. Nothing was learned as to the significance of these objects. The *alferoces* remained for a time inside the church drinking rum and singing. They then went by fours to pray in turn before each of the crosses set up in the village. The rest of the day they spent visiting the house of each one of them in turn; in each house they sang the same song sung in the church; in each the host offered rum, so that by nightfall all were drunk. These acts were to be twice repeated during the days following. They had for their stated purpose the announcement of the days of carnival. On the following Thursday the carnival became generally celebrated, and many natives went out costumed and masked.

The *alferoces* were accompanied by musicians, and also by three personages carrying the dried bodies of, respectively, a wild cat, a rodent called *saben*, and an iguana. Villa was informed that these animals are used in a later festal pantomime in which the *alferoces* enact a sowing, and in which these animals are represented as performing their characteristic mischief."

Villa observed other elements of the carnival ritual in Oxchuc. On Thursday, February 24, Indians of the calpul of Santo Tomás assembled in the church where they prayed for a time before the large altar, and then danced and drank rum in the nave. The dance was performed alternately by men and by women, and was accompanied by music from a harp, a guitar, and a rattle made of a calabash and a deer's hoof. On the following day these acts were performed by Indians of the other calpul; on this occasion the music was furnished by two drums and a flute, and the leader (*capitán*) was dressed in red. On this latter day natives of the calpul of Santo Tomás moved in procession through the streets; four individuals bore each a large pole to which were fastened ribbons of various colors; a fifth carried a red banner.

²⁰ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, p. 359.

²¹ *Ibid.* 2: 160-162.

²² *Ibid.* 2: 164-165.

²³ The frequent association, in Middle America, of small animals, especially furred animals, with festivals, in connection with ideas of fertility and of festal buffoonery, has been noted. See Redfield, 1936, pp. 231-243.

796 carried a red banner. At the church the four men performed a dance. Divided into
535 pairs facing each other at a distance of 6 m., they first shook the ribbons on their
poles while giving loud cries, varied by putting the hand over the mouth, and
running to meet one another. Then they made a slight inclination of the head,
turned half around, and returned to their original places. After repeating this
thrice, the pairs exchanged places and performed new figures. At the conclusion
they surrounded the flag-bearer, shouting and waving the ribbons.

796 Although harp and guitars were here used in an apparently religious dance.
534 in several of the communities it appears that the stringed instruments of European
184 origin (guitar, violin, and harp) are used only for secular purposes, the religious
[199] musical instruments (which are often kept in the church) consisting of cane flute
(*ahmay*) and drums. In Chanal two drums are used, a large drum (*kayob*) and
a small one (*chin kayob*). In Tenejapa the single drum is called *anteel* and is
accompanied by a sort of cornet.

798 Some minor observances having to do with the cult of the saints may be
796 mentioned. In the highland villages it is usual for each important saint to be repre-
184 sented by two images of which one, the genuine *santo*, is too sacred to be taken
[199] from the church; the other, called *debo* (for *doble*) substitutes for the true *santo*
in religious processions. In Bachajón the care of the church is alternated weekly
between the two *calpules*; on Christmas Eve each church-caretaker (*prora*) must
contribute to the decoration of the altar ten little figures of clay, of which five are
in the form of a bull, and five in the form of a horse and rider. The church at
Citalá contains many *santos* of which two (San Mateo and San Gabriel) are
painted black and enjoy special prestige. In this church a straw mat, yellow in
color with red ribbons interwoven, is used to kneel upon before the principal saints;
it is kept with extraordinary care. At Citalá a principal annual event is the ritual
washing of the saints' clothing. This occurs two weeks after Holy Week. The
"Great Washing," when the clothing of the principal saints is washed, is performed
at a spring where the water is thought to be of absolute purity. The "Small
Washing" of the clothes of the lesser saints may be done in the river. The Great
Washing is reported as involving the consumption of eight hogs and a great
quantity of rum.

798 Although it is evident that the religion of the Tzeltals contains many pagan
[114] elements, some of which have been reported by Blom and LaFarge. Villa's notes
798 do not add a great deal on this point. The use of hilltop shrines was noted at
796 Oxchuc, where one of these is called *Ikal Ahau*, apparently after an ancient deity.³⁷
The teacher at Amatenango reports that the Indians there make offerings for
rain at a rock marked with a zigzag thought to represent the lightning. No
information was obtained on the beliefs as to *nahuales*; this subject is discussed
by Blom and LaFarge, 37.

³⁷ The image corresponds precisely with that of the pairs of crosses used by the Quintana Roo Maya, of which one
the cross had no arms moved about in ritual.

³⁸ Blom and LaFarge, 1927, 2:362-374.

³⁹ Nuñez de la Vega (1702, p. 52) says, "Los de Oxchuc y de otros pueblos de los Llanos veneran mucho al ídolo
que llaman Icalahau, que quiere decir negro principal, o señor de negro," as quoted in Becerra, 1922, p. 244.

778 paper, brightened with colour added by a cigarette package, a label from a tin of beets in a deep red, a joke in German about the fall of the mark, of which the prevailing tone was pure viridian, and a page of advertising from the Saturday Evening Post. We gave [123] this family a chromo of a saint, which was immediately framed with a sort of wooden box, and set up beside the cross. The table below was used for laying odds and ends on, such as the spindle and a couple of empty aguardiente bottles.

782 Incense, *pom*, and candles, both extensively used by the Indians today, had a place in the old Maya ritual similar to that of the Catholic Church.
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793 The Priest is an important figure to the Indians. They come to him with respect to tell him their troubles, and receive him into their villages with rejoicing. At the same time, there is no doubt that they deliberately hoodwink him as to the orthodoxy of their faith.

796 Although it includes several non-Christian elements, a description of the fiesta observed at Tecojá will give a fair idea of the Tzeltal's church observances. Tecojá ranch has a village of about [241] twenty houses attached to it. The fiesta was held on the twenty-second and twenty-third of June. By custom, the ranch had to [648] allow the Indians this time off, as well as accepting the lowered efficiency on the following "cold grey dawn of the morning after." The owners had, moreover, to provide the rum for the whole celebration, in this case, two demi-johns.

[794] The ranch chapel was thrown open and decorated with fir branches and streamers. The proceedings were in charge of two older men, called *caporales*, who were distinguished by a cross-belt-
ing of red handkerchiefs. One house was set aside for the celebrations, in front of which was a table and three triangular, crimson banners with gold edges. By these drumming and flute-playing went on irregularly. Here was the official dispensary for rum, which was given out by the *caporales*. Inside the house, a palm-thatched one with stick walls, about fifteen feet square, some thirty [534] Indians, men and women, were squatting against the walls. There was an orchestra of a guitar and a mouth-organ, occasionally augmented by the piper, who would wander in from outside. This individual, although most amazingly drunk, managed to maintain his [533] musical ability until he fell asleep. The tune they played was like a rather wistful jig, but the time was lively. To this four couples [535] danced, the men facing the women, with a shuffling step not unlike waltzing. They kept very much in one place, but occasionally changed sides. The dancing was evidently a serious affair. This type is called in Spanish *zapatea*, in Tzeltal, *ahk'Out*.

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tives whose positions in this household fiesta are established on the basis of their age and experience in office, took up the established positions for these roles in the house of the new *alférez*. The first *nakawane* blessed the liquor; two bottles were measured into shot glasses and served to the guests. After this the meal was served.

The second day (*Wišpereš*). All the *nakawanehetik* appointed for the new *alférez* gathered in his house at nine o'clock in the morning to drink. The first and second *nakawanehetik* went to the *cabildo* to ask the judge and president when the new *alférez* must take out the holy banner. The president replied that it would be in two days. The question was rhetorical: everyone knew that the ceremony of taking out the banners occurred on the fourth day of the fiesta, and the day itself was named *Slok' Krus*, taking out of the cross (the banner has a cross adorning the staff). What was being communicated to the civil officials by the question was the recognition of responsibility to the new *alférez* by the *nakawanehetik*. In the afternoon of this day, another meal of beef stew and tortillas was served to the same guests assembled on the previous day.

The third day (*Sk'ak'halel Sk'in*). At cock's crow the parents of the new *alférez* awakened him. Gathered in the house were the woman speaker, the guitarist, and the *nakawanehetik*. Under the direction of the woman speaker, the *alférez*' wife helped him put on his clothing, and the guitarist accompanied this procedure with music. When he was dressed, the new *alférez* danced a turn before the assembled guests to show his new clothing, and reviewed the *pat'o'tan* with the *nakawanehetik* who had taught him. He then went with his guitarist to raise his companions. First he went to the third *alférez* and awakened him. He greeted the *nakawane* of the third *alférez* with the *pat'o'tan*, and was invited to sit down; he was served coffee and bread, followed by a mouthwash. The third *alférez* dressed, and after the two were served liquor they danced a turn. In this same fashion, the new *alférez* raised all of his companions. The assembled group went to the *cabildo*.

The *nakawanehetik* and the *b'alnialetik*, after drinking coffee and eating bean tortillas, went to collect the things needed to receive official

794 guests. They borrowed benches from neighbors; they cut juniper and pre-
796 pared the resting place for the sacred banner; they borrowed seed-gourd
rattles and two tables, and they adorned the house with pine branches and
fruit. In the afternoon, all the relatives, the compadres, and the neighbors
were invited. Two alisiles were appointed (this term is probably a Tzeltal
rendition of alguacil, in Spanish an office corresponding to high bailiff or
peace officer). The alisiles were charged with watching to see that neither
the new alferez nor either of his two guitarists got too drunk to carry out
his functions.

794 The two alisiles called out the women to dance, first asking permission
796 of the woman speaker. The dance was the most important act in the set of
• 535 performances on the third day, which was sometimes referred to as the
562 "afternoon of the big dance." The dance was a highly charged event be-
cause the women were for the first time cast in a public role. Fear and
[626] shame, the two conditioning mechanisms of socialization in Tzeltal, had to be overcome when the women became involved in the dance. Spe-
[54] cial precautions were taken: the alisil formally requested the woman
speaker to take the women out:

[539] Lord, women who nursed us, give pardon with God, the Virgin
Mother. Give holy pardon mother and father with God and with the
Virgin Mother. We have gathered here, collected together your child,
your offspring, where it is not very pretty, not very flavorful, at the
door of your holy poverty, holy suffering, for the holy office, the holy
prayer. Again our clay, our mud comes to speak here to the mothers
who nursed, who give us fear and embarrassment.

Then the alferoces took off their hats and kerchiefs and brought them to
the women. This act was described by an informant: "The women cover
their heads with the kerchief and put on the hat. The girls want the hand-
kerchief and the hat of their husbands in order not to be ashamed to be
seen by a boy. They want the kerchief to hide their faces. If they do not
want the hat, it is when they are mature women and do not have shame.
The wives of the alferoces do not have shame because it is their job." The
use of the kerchief which was draped over their head, partially covering

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their eyes, the posture of dance in which they clasped their hands at their stomach-band—all of these manifested the shame that they were overcoming. Whether they really felt the shame or not was irrelevant since they were being judged in terms of their behavior. The wives circled around with a two-step, their eyes downcast and their hands clasped over their stomach-bands, while their husbands stepped up and down in place in a ring around them, shaking the gourd rattle and joking.

When the dancing was terminated, a joking session was initiated by the *nakawane*. The signal for this was the lighting of the first round of cigarettes. Smoking, like drinking, was required of everyone and was rarely indulged in privately. The women sometimes put aside the cigarettes, but they had to accept them. At midnight a meal of bean tortillas and coffee was served.

The fourth day (*Slok' K'rus*). The four *regidores* arrived early in the morning to raise the *alférez* and take him to the *cabildo* to receive the oath. In this function the *regidores* were referred to as *personaetik* or "persons." The Spanish term *persona* signifies the exterior appearance by which men of merit were distinguished, and in its Latin derivation *persona* is the mask by which role is indicated. I think it is in the sense of assuming a new identity that the Indians incorporated the term as a reference for specific roles assumed by the *regidores* at this time. The *alcaldes*, or judges, were on this day referred to as *koronaetik*, or colonels. This reference term evoked the military ranking system, as did also the term *alférez* or captain, and established the relative ranking of the two sets of officials in the *cabildo* on the day of receiving the banners. The *alfereces* were given titles to indicate the order of their entry into office. The seating order of the four in the *cabildo* followed the succession pattern, with the first to take office sitting nearest to the door.

The new *alférez*, with two of his four escorts on either side, sat on the visitor's bench along with the higher officials, themselves once *alfereces*. The first *regidor*, or *persona*, addressed the first judge with the *pa'o'tan*. The fourth *regidor* distributed a liter of *trago* to the assembled officials, first to the judges, then the president and *sindico*, the *alfereces*, the person-

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796 aetik, and finally the new alférez. The first judge spoke with each set of officials, saying, "God, we have finished the gift of your ancestors"; and the departing alférez said, "So it is, elders."

The new alférez took his banner from the table and went outside with the four personatik, followed by the other alfereces carrying their banners, and by the president, the sindico, and the koronaetik, who carried their staffs of office. They went in a procession to the home of the outgoing alférez; at the fence of his house, they lined up their banners in the stand provided. The wife of the outgoing alférez, with the nakawane, brought burning incense from the house and placed it before the banners. The first nakawane exchanged the pat'o'tan with the first judge. In a column of paired officials, they approached the house and seated themselves on the porch. The judges went to the first nakawane and greeted him with the pat'o'tan; then, standing at the door of the interior of the house, the first judge repeated the greeting with the woman speaker.

[273] The nakawane ordered the b'alnialetik to bring the fermented corn gruel. After it was served, the b'alnial put a small table in the middle of the porch, covered it with the embroidered cloth, and set two liters of liquor on it. The nakawane rose and gave the pat'o'tan to the first judge. He asked permission of the woman speaker to drink, and when this was granted, the b'alnialetik measured out and served the trago.

• [535] After the two bottles of trago had been consumed, the alisil took the wife of the outgoing alférez, and the dance began, following the same pattern described above. The dancing was followed by a procession to the church in which the new alférez carried the banner, thereby asserting his succession to the office. The old alférez remained in his house with his assembled guests.

[788] In the movement of the banners by the alfereces, one could see the symbolic military behavior: the procession to the house was a mock column of march; the military titles of the alfereces and the "colonels" were carried out in vocative and referential titles in the prayers. The handling of the banners was always done with show of sacred respect: cloths were used to handle them, and they were always set carefully in appointed places so the pole never touched the ground; incense was set nearby when they were unattended. In the ceremonial movement from the houses of the al-

576 support of whatever is said—repeating the final phrase of the person conversing or injecting supportive statements such as “indeed, indeed,” or “so it is.” In the dance of the *alfereces*’ wives, for example, women were the model of deference, moving in a self-contained pattern before the assembled guests, with slow, tiny steps; eyes downcast, a shawl covering their heads on which they wore their husbands’ ceremonial hats.

[535] Through recruitment procedures, alternation and linkage in official roles, and leadership validated by age and service in lower positions—principles applying to role relations in all institutions—Tzo’ontahal has remained an integrated community. There is a high degree of stereotyping in behavior from one institution to another, and norms of behavior are the same for public as for private roles. However, a remarkably high homicide rate and open conflict in all of the institutional settings indicate basic sources of disruption.

682 Since 1960 the rate of homicide in town has increased from an average
593 of 1 every 2 years to an average of 5 or 6 per year. Table 29 indicates the
609 role relationships of killer to victim in 37 of over 70 homicides occurring
428 between 1937 and 1964. The highest incidence of homicide (7 cases) occurred
578 between brothers and brothers-in-law. Male siblings comprise the closest cooperating group. Brothers work together in the *milpa* until the father dies or divides his property among his children during his lifetime. Bilateral inheritance with equal division of land and houses among female as well as male offspring means that brothers-in-law are potential competitors for the same limited resources. Friction arising among brothers and brothers-in-law does not come from the principle of equal inheritance, but rather because of the fact of differing responsibilities and expenses within the family. For example, the child who has remained with the parents and

[688] thus assumes the burden of care for them in their declining years often feels that he should inherit a greater share. The disputes arise in the decisions concerning how much this disadvantage should be weighted. The suppression of overt competition may in part explain the homicidal acts. Although the tensions in fact stem from suppressed economic competition, [154] they are translated into witchcraft accusations as soon as anyone in the [626] family becomes ill. Violence against a witch is condoned by the community and provides a channel for latent hostility. Once the accusation has

$\frac{1}{\lambda}$ (see pp.245-247...Analyst)